

# LANGUAGES SPOKEN

BEYOND THE N.W. FRONTIER OF INDIA.



BY

GEORGE A. GRIERSON, C.I.E., PH.D., I.C.S.

[*From the "JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY," July, 1900.*]







ART. XXI.—*On the Languages spoken beyond the North-Western Frontier of India.* With a map. By  
GEORGE A. GRIERSON, C.I.E., Ph.D., I.C.S.

BETWEEN the north-west frontier of our Indian Empire and the Pāmirs there is a tract of mountainous country inhabited by many different nationalities, speaking many different tongues. The Pāmirs themselves are a polyglot region. Taking Zēbāk, for instance, the district round it is the home of no less than four distinct speeches—one West-Iranian, Persian, and three East-Iranian, Wakhī, Shighnī, and Ishkāshamī. These last belong to the same Aryan group as Pakshtō. To the south-east of the Pāmirs we come to the Burushaskī spoken in Hunza and Nagar, a language of Scythian stock, whose immediate affinities have not yet been identified. South-east, again, of the Burushaskī area we come to Bāltistān, where another Scythian language, the Tibeto-Burman Bāltī, is the vernacular. In the valley of Kāshmir, there is Kāshmirī, and in the lower reaches of the Jhelum and in the Murree Hills, Chhibhālī, both of which are Indo-Aryan, and can be traced up to ancient Sanskrit. West of the Chhibhālī tract lies the British district of Hazara, of which the principal language is a form of Western Panjābī. Crossing the Indus we come to the Northern Pakhtō dialect of Pakshtō spoken in Peshawar, Swāt, and Bajaur. West of Bajaur, beyond the Kunar River, we come to Laghmān. North of Laghmān lies Kāfiristān, through which we again reach the Pāmirs.

We have now described a circle, and it remains to consider the interior portion of this tract. It consists of a number of river systems. The first is the Gilgit Valley, leading

into the Indus shortly after the latter debouches from Bāltistān. Lower down, the Tāngīr and the Kāndiā fall into the Indus, which has hitherto been flowing westwards, but takes a southerly course after its junction with the latter river. The language of the Gilgit Valley, and of the Indus Valley from Bāltistān to the Tāngīr, is Shīnā in various dialects. This form of speech also extends to the south-east of the last-named river, and occupies a large block of mountain country between Bāltistān and the valley of Kāshmir.

From its junction with the Kāndiā to its entry into British territory, the Indus runs in a southerly direction through groups of hills, known collectively as the Indus Kōhistān, and inhabited by a number of wild tribes who all speak varieties of a language of Indo-Aryan origin, which, like Chhibhālī, can be traced to ancient Sanskrit, and which is called Indus-Kōhistānī or Maiyā.<sup>1</sup> Colonel Biddulph has given us vocabularies of two of these dialects under the name of Gowro and Chiliss. The Linguistic Survey of India, on which I am at present engaged, gives further details, including a brief grammar and specimens.

To the west of the Indus-Kōhistān lie, in order, the valleys of the Śwāt, the Panjkōrā, and the Kunar. Those of the first two are known as the Śwāt- and Panjkōrā-Kōhistāns respectively. Here the language of the bulk of the people was formerly an Indian one, allied to Indus-Kōhistānī, but is now, owing to Pathān domination, almost invariably Pakshtō. Only a faithful few still cling to their ancient language, though they have abandoned their Aryan religion, and the dialects which they speak are called Gārwi and Tōrwālī. These three, Indus-Kōhistānī, Gārwi, and Tōrwālī, together form one well-defined group of languages, Indo-Aryan in origin, and evidently descended from ancient Sanskrit. They form a connecting link in the chain of North-Western Indo-Aryan languages, commencing with Sindhī, and passing *viā* Western Panjābī, through them, into Chhibhālī and

<sup>1</sup> The sign ~ over a vowel indicates a nasal pronunciation.



Kāshmirī. The Survey has made available grammars, vocabularies, and specimens of all of them. In this part of the country, Pakṣhṭō itself hardly gets further west than the hills forming the eastern side of the Kunar Valley. Nowhere does it cross that river.

North of the Ṣwāt and Panjkōrā Valleys we find the country of Chitral, lying on both sides of the Kunar River, which is here known as the Qāshqār, Chitrār, or (to Europeans) Chitral. The main speech of this country is called Chitrārī, or Khō-wār, and is spoken as far east as Yāsin, where it marches with Burushaskī and Shīnā. Khō-wār is evidently related to the latter language. They form a pair belonging to the Irano-Indian stock, and to the Indian branch of that family. They are hence to be classed as Indo-Aryan. This is at once established by a consideration of their phonetic systems, but their grammars present certain peculiarities which will be alluded to shortly.

The two main affluents of the Chitral-Kunar River are the Bashgal and the Waigal, both of which join it on the west after passing through the hill country of Kāfiristān. The first-named is the most northern, and takes its rise in the southern face of the Hindū Kush. It joins the Chitral near the village of Narsāt. The Waigal, after itself receiving the waters of the Wēzgal, falls into the Chitral some way below Asmār. It is formed in the interior of Kāfiristān. The Valley of the Bashgal is the home of the Bashgalī language, which is the speech of the Siāh-pūsh Kāfirs generally. A vocabulary and a few grammatical forms have been published by Colonel Biddulph, and a formal grammar by Colonel Davidson is now, I believe, in the press. East of the Bashgal Valley, Wasī-veri, another Kāfir language, is spoken in the Wēzgal Valley. A grammatical sketch, specimens, and a vocabulary of this will be published by the Linguistic Survey. It is evidently distantly related to Bashgalī, and, like the remaining Kāfir languages, is spoken by the Sufid-pūsh Kāfirs. These remaining ones are Ashkun, spoken in the heart of the Kāfir country, and Wai, the language of the Waigal Valley. Regarding

Ashkun, no information of any kind is as yet available. All the efforts of my kind friends in Chitral and the Khaibar Pass have been unavailing. For Wai, we have some vocabularies of doubtful authority. This exhausts the list of the known languages of Kāfiristān. The two about which we have any certain knowledge, Bashgalī and Wasī-veri, are, like Khō-wār and Shīnā, certainly Indo-Aryan in their phonetic systems, but, also like them, possess grammars which present difficulties to the student.

We know that in prehistoric times the Aryan, or Irano-Indian, language split up into two, an Iranian and an Indian. We know also that the Iranian again split up into two branches, a Western and an Eastern. The modern representative of Western Iranian is Persian, and the most important one of Eastern Iranian is Pakshtō. The modern Indo-Aryan vernaculars are the present-day representatives of the Indian branch. These three branches are recognizable by well-defined phonetic laws. A convenient shibboleth is the Persian *dast*, 'a hand,' which corresponds to the Pakshtō *lās* and the Indian *hāth* or *hast*. These four languages—Wasī-veri, Bashgalī, Khō-wār, and Shīnā—agree in following the Indian phonetic system, but in some grammatical particulars they show remarkable points of agreement with the Eastern Iranian tongues. The modern Indo-Aryan languages can all be traced back to the ancient Sanskrit spoken in Vedic times. This is true both of their phonetic systems and of their grammars, but by no course of derivation with which I am at present acquainted can I recognize the Sanskrit originals of some of the grammatical forms presented by these four. This may be my fault; it very possibly is so, for we lack the connecting link between them and the ancient language from which they are derived, which we possess in the Prakrits for the vernaculars of India. If we had such a link, i.e. specimens of the mediaeval language spoken below the Hindū Kush, the affiliation of the four with Sanskrit might be easy, but till this is the case, the most that we can say is that while their phonetic system is the same as



that of the Sanskrit-derived languages spoken further south, we are unable to say positively that they are derived from the Sanskrit with which we are acquainted. Judging from the well-ascertained facts regarding the origin of the modern true Indian languages, we may argue from analogy and say that it is probable that the four *were* derived from Sanskrit, but how they were derived, and by what stages, we are not at present able to say. This fact, together with the remarkable circumstance that some of their grammatical forms agree with those of the Eastern Iranian languages, has led certain scholars to suggest, with at least equal probability, that while the four are undoubtedly Indian, they are not necessarily Sanskritic, but are descended from a mother-dialect closely akin to Sanskrit, of which, possibly, ancient Sanskrit was a further developed form. This mother-dialect was, so to speak, left behind below the Hindū Kush, while the bulk of its speakers went on into India, and there founded the Indo-Aryan civilization, and the Indo-Aryan speech.<sup>1</sup> While it is impossible in the present state of our knowledge to prove this contention, it can at least be said to be not impossible, and to explain some difficult points. If it is true, then the four languages represent a stage of the Indian branch of the Aryan family older than Sanskrit, a stage which had already developed all the phonetic system of that branch, but which still retained some linguistic connection with its Iranian sisters on the other side of the Hindū Kush. It only remains to state that there is no sudden change between these languages and the definitely Indian ones of the North Panjab. The two sets merge into each other by stages. The first stage consists of the Kalāshā, Gawar-bati, and Pashai languages, about which I am now going to speak, which are *almost* certainly Sanskritic, yet still show remarkable points of contact with

<sup>1</sup> An interesting point of agreement between these four languages and the Eastern Iranian ones is the infinitive in *k*. Thus, with the Eastern Iranian Wakhī of the Pāmirs, *chilgāk*, 'to desire,' and the Ormūri of Wazīristān, *ghwīk*, 'to say,' compare the Wasī-veri *pesum-tinik*, 'to beat,' the Khō-wār *bīk*, and the Shīnā *bōki*, 'to become,' and, finally, among languages to be dealt with later on, the Kalāshā *hik*, and the Gawar-bati and Pashai *bīk*, 'to be.'

Khō-wār ; and the second of the Kōhistān languages already described, which are *quite* certainly of Sanskrit origin. This points us to a state of affairs in the olden time which is just what might have been expected, viz. the old parent language of the four gradually merging into its sister, the Sanskrit of the north-west of the Panjab, by insensible gradations, and not separated from it by any hard and fast lines.

The Kalāshā Kāfirs dwell in the *dōāb* between the Chitral and Bashgal Rivers. They have a language of their own, which is called by their tribal name. Dr. Leitner gave some information about it many years ago, which has now been supplemented by the Survey. Lower down the Chitral, at the junction with the Bashgal, in and about the country of Narsāt, dwell the Gawars, who also have a language of their own known as Gawar-bati, or Gawar-speech, of which a vocabulary was given by Colonel Biddulph under the name of Narisati. Still lower down, on the right bank of the Chitral, which has now become the Kunar, dwell the Pashais, who also have a language of their own. Pashai is spoken as far west as Laghmān, and extends as far north as the Waigal Valley, though whether it is the same as the Wai Kāfir already alluded to I have not yet been able to determine satisfactorily. At any rate, it is by far the most western outpost of the Indo-Aryan languages. It is an island of Indian speech in the heart of Afghanistan, and is bounded on the north by the Kāfir dialects and on the other three sides by Pakshtō. These three languages, Kalāshā, Gawar-bati, and Pashai, are all very closely connected. They are certainly Indo-Aryan, and nearly certainly Sanskritic, though it must be pointed out that they possess some of the typical grammatical peculiarities of the four languages with which we have just been dealing.<sup>1</sup> Kalāshā, whose habitat is close to that of Khō-wār, possesses most points of continuity with that language, and forms a bridge between it and the other two, which in their turn

<sup>1</sup> For instance, the infinitive in *k* to which attention was called in the last footnote.



bridge over the gap between Kalāshā and the undoubted Sanskritic languages of the Panjkōrā, Śwāt, and Indus Kōhistāns.

To complete this list of languages spoken on the north-west frontier, wandering shepherds, known as Gūjars, inhabit the country between the Kunar and the eastern border of Kāshmir, and perhaps still further to the east. These have a language of their own—a purely Sanskritic one—which, curiously enough, is nearly the same as the Mēwārī spoken in distant Rajputana, and is closely allied to Gujarātī.

Full descriptions of Kalāshā and Gawar-bati appeared in the papers which I had the honour of presenting to the last Oriental Congress. Since then, through the kindness of Mr. J. G. Lorimer, I.C.S., Political Officer of the Khaibar, I have received complete specimens of Pashai, and, as this language has hitherto been almost unknown, the following further particulars concerning it will be of interest. The only information which up to the present time has been available has been a short list of 'Pushye'<sup>1</sup> words by Burnes, and two brief vocabularies, one of Laghmānī and one of Pashai by Leech. Leech was under the impression that these two were distinct languages, but really the names only connote two dialects of the same form of speech.

Pashai, properly speaking, is the name of the language spoken by the Dēhgāns of Laghmān and the country to the east of it. It is also called Laghmānī from the tract in which it is spoken, and Dēhgānī, because most of its speakers belong to the Dēhgān tribe. The boundaries of the language are said to be, roughly, on the west the Laghmān River, on the north the boundary of the Kāfirs, on the east the Kunar River, and on the south the Kābul River, but the riverain villages on the left bank of the Kābul speak Pakshtō, not Pashai. A certain number of Pakshtō-speaking communities are also found interspersed

<sup>1</sup> The only importance of this list is that the spelling of the name misled Lassen, who put it down, on Burnes' authority, as a distinct language. I owe this piece of information to the kindness of Dr. Kuhn.

Khō-wār ; and the second of the Kōhistān languages already described, which are *quite* certainly of Sanskrit origin. This points us to a state of affairs in the olden time which is just what might have been expected, viz. the old parent language of the four gradually merging into its sister, the Sanskrit of the north-west of the Panjab, by insensible gradations, and not separated from it by any hard and fast lines.

The Kalāshā Kāfirs dwell in the *dōāb* between the Chitral and Bashgal Rivers. They have a language of their own, which is called by their tribal name. Dr. Leitner gave some information about it many years ago, which has now been supplemented by the Survey. Lower down the Chitral, at the junction with the Bashgal, in and about the country of Narsāt, dwell the Gawars, who also have a language of their own known as Gawar-bati, or Gawar-speech, of which a vocabulary was given by Colonel Biddulph under the name of Narisati. Still lower down, on the right bank of the Chitral, which has now become the Kunar, dwell the Pashais, who also have a language of their own. Pashai is spoken as far west as Laghmān, and extends as far north as the Waigal Valley, though whether it is the same as the Wai Kāfir already alluded to I have not yet been able to determine satisfactorily. At any rate, it is by far the most western outpost of the Indo-Aryan languages. It is an island of Indian speech in the heart of Afghanistan, and is bounded on the north by the Kāfir dialects and on the other three sides by Pakshtō. These three languages, Kalāshā, Gawar-bati, and Pashai, are all very closely connected. They are certainly Indo-Aryan, and nearly certainly Sanskritic, though it must be pointed out that they possess some of the typical grammatical peculiarities of the four languages with which we have just been dealing.<sup>1</sup> Kalāshā, whose habitat is close to that of Khō-wār, possesses most points of continuity with that language, and forms a bridge between it and the other two, which in their turn

<sup>1</sup> For instance, the infinitive in *k* to which attention was called in the last footnote.



bridge over the gap between Kalāshā and the undoubted Sanskritic languages of the Panjkōrā, Śwāt, and Indus Kōhistāns.

To complete this list of languages spoken on the north-west frontier, wandering shepherds, known as Gūjars, inhabit the country between the Kunar and the eastern border of Kāshmir, and perhaps still further to the east. These have a language of their own—a purely Sanskritic one—which, curiously enough, is nearly the same as the Mēwārī spoken in distant Rajputana, and is closely allied to Gujarātī.

Full descriptions of Kalāshā and Gawar-bati appeared in the papers which I had the honour of presenting to the last Oriental Congress. Since then, through the kindness of Mr. J. G. Lorimer, I.C.S., Political Officer of the Khaibar, I have received complete specimens of Pashai, and, as this language has hitherto been almost unknown, the following further particulars concerning it will be of interest. The only information which up to the present time has been available has been a short list of 'Pushye'<sup>1</sup> words by Burnes, and two brief vocabularies, one of Laghmānī and one of Pashai by Leech. Leech was under the impression that these two were distinct languages, but really the names only connote two dialects of the same form of speech.

Pashai, properly speaking, is the name of the language spoken by the Dēhgāns of Laghmān and the country to the east of it. It is also called Laghmānī from the tract in which it is spoken, and Dēhgānī, because most of its speakers belong to the Dēhgān tribe. The boundaries of the language are said to be, roughly, on the west the Laghmān River, on the north the boundary of the Kāfirs, on the east the Kunar River, and on the south the Kābul River, but the riverain villages on the left bank of the Kābul speak Pakshtō, not Pashai. A certain number of Pakshtō-speaking communities are also found interspersed

<sup>1</sup> The only importance of this list is that the spelling of the name misled Lassen, who put it down, on Burnes' authority, as a distinct language. I owe this piece of information to the kindness of Dr. Kuhn.

OF LANGUAGES SPOKEN BEYOND THE NORTH-WESTERN FRONTIER OF INDIA,  
EXPLANATORY OF THE ACCOMPANYING MAP.

GROUP.	LANGUAGE.	DIALECT.	WHERE SPOKEN.
?	Burushaskī,	Standard	Hunza and Nagar.
Tibeto-Burman	Khajunā, or Kunjūtī	Wārshikwār	Yāsin and neighbourhood.
	Tibetan	Bāltī	Bāltistān.
	Persian	Badakhshī	Badakhshān.
	Wakhī	Standard	Wakhān, and near Zēbāk.
	Shighnī or Khugnī	„	Shighnān, Rōshān, Gharan, and near Zēbāk.
	Sariq-qōlī	„	Taghdumbāsh Pāmir and Sarikol.
	Ishkāshamī, Zēbākī, or Sanglichī	„	Ishkāsham, Zēbāk, and valleys of the Dōrah Nuqsān Passes.
	Munjānī or Mungī	„	Munjān.
	„	Yüdghā or Leotkuh-i-wār	Upper part of the Lutkho Valley, south of the Hi Kush.
	Pakstō	Northern or Pakhtō	Şwāt, Dīr, and Bajaur. Parts of Hazara, Peshawar, and the country to the west. As a <i>lingua franca</i> of the Indus Valley for a considerable distance.
Eastern			
Shīnā-Khōwār	Shīnā	North-Western	North-west of Gilgit.
„	„	Gilgitī	Gilgit Valley.
„	„	Astōrī	Astōr Valley.
„	„	Brōkpā of Dāh-Hanū	On Indus, near Bāltistān, and Ladakh Frontier.
„	„	Chilāsī	Indus Valley from near Astōr to Tāngīr and Sazīn.
„	Khō-wār, Arniyā, or Chitrārī	Standard	Chitral and part of Yāsin.
Kāfir	Bashgalī	Standard	North Kāfiristān, especially the Bashgal Valley.
„	Wasī-veri or Veron	„	Spoken by the Prēsun Kāfirs.
„	Wai-galī or Wai	„	The valley of the Waigal.
„	Ashkun	„	Nothing is known about this language except its name and the fact that its speakers live to the south-west of the Prēsuns. Its classification is therefore provisional.
? N.W. Sanskritic	Kalāshā	„	The Dōāb between the Bashgal and Chitral Rivers.
„	Gawar-bati or Narsātī	„	Round the confluence of the Bashgal and Chitral Rivers.
„	Pashai	Eastern	East Laghmān.
„	„	Western	West Laghmān.
N.W. Sanskritic	Indus Kōhistānī or Maiyā	Kilī Dubērī Jīb	Kandiā and Dubēr Valleys.
„	„	Eastern	East side of Kōhistān.
„	„	Western	Western Kōhistān, round Kōlī, Pālus, Batērā, Chitral, and elsewhere.
„	„	Southern	South Kōhistān.
„	Gārwi	Standard	Şwāt Kōhistān.
„	„	Dīrī	Dīr.
„	Tōrwālī	Standard	Şwāt and Panjkōrā Kōhistāns below Gārwi.
„	Kāshmīrī	„	Valley of Kashmīr.
„	Chhibhālī	„	Hill country between the Kashmīr Valley and the Indus Kōhistān.
Central Sanskritic	Hīndī (Rājasthānī)	Gujarī	Spoken by Gūjars over the country to the east of Chitral-Kunar River.

Total : Twenty-four languages ; thirty-five dialects.

Between Chitral and Chilās there is a mountainous tract of country which has not yet been linguistically explored. It is said to be principally inhabited by Gūjars who speak their own language. There are several sub-dialects of Gujarī which differ slightly from each other.



at other places within these limits. The principal places and neighbourhoods in which Pashai is spoken are Barkōt, Sutan, Waigal on the side next the Kāfirs, Janjapur, Amlā, Sūr<sup>a</sup>ch,<sup>1</sup> Badiālī, Islāmpur, Bādshāh K<sup>a</sup>le, Balatak, Kunada, Dēogal, Nurgal, Chaman, Najīl, Sāū, Kulmān, Tagāo, Siāū, and Kulāb. Some of these are considerable tracts. The number of people speaking Pashai has been estimated at 100,000, and with regard to the Pashai region and its probable character this estimate does not appear to be unduly large or unduly small.

There appear to be different dialects of Pashai, but the variations are said to be not great. The distinction drawn by the people themselves is between the 'harsh tongues' of the hills<sup>2</sup> and the softer tongue of the more level country. I have myself examined specimens in two dialects, a western and an eastern. The differences are mainly ones of pronunciation. Thus, the short <sup>a</sup>, which is so common in Pakshtō, also occurs in the eastern dialect, but usually appears as a long ē in the western one. For instance, Eastern *puṭhl<sup>a</sup>*, Western *puṭhlē*, a son. Again, an Eastern *sh* becomes a Western *kh*, as in Eastern *shūring*, Western *khōring*, a dog.

In order to explain the accompanying map, I append a table giving the names of the various languages spoken beyond the North-Western Frontier of India, with their dialects and habitats.

<sup>1</sup> The small <sup>a</sup> above the line indicates the very short *a*-sound known as the *fathā-e afghānī*, which is so common in Pakshtō.

<sup>2</sup> One of these is called Kulmānī from being spoken in Kulmān.



